CHURCH NEWS

FROM THE NORTHERN COUNTRIES

Edited by
THE NORTHERN ECUMENICAL INSTITUTE
Sigtuna, Sweden

Director: Dr. HARRY JOHANSSON, Sigtuna, Sweden
Editor: Rev. JOHS. LANGHOFF, Øster Egesborg per Mern, Denmark

No. 42 November 22nd, 1958.

Northern Comments on the Papal Election.

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"Not only our Roman Catholic fellow-Christians are mourning, but also the Evangelical Christendom. A great man has passed away, a man to whom the whole world owes much. He was a father to the members of his church and a leading personality to the whole world. His time as Pope has been one of the most dramatic in the history of the world, but, in a unique way, he knew how to make the word of the Church heard in the changing situations. His brilliant intelligence, his warm love for men and a strong will to turn thought and feeling into action were his special characteristics. It will be of immense importance to the whole Christendom who is to be his successor. In times like ours, full of tension and unrest, the election of a pope must be of interest to all people."

Not everybody was agreed about the opportuneness of the appearance of such a statement by a prominent Lutheran leader and during the following days the press brought a number of protests.

In a leader the "Församlingsbladet" in Finland, a weekly paper in Swedish, rather severely criticized the unheard-of publicity obtained by the death of the Pope and the papal election in Finland where there are only 1.800 Roman Catholics. The detailed accounts in the press are attributed to the fact that the international news bureaux issue the same material to non-Roman Catholic and Roman Catholic papers alike and these papers pass on the news rather uncritically. As a matter of principle the paper is happy about the fact that the international distribution of news helps to break down old unjustified partition walls, but adds: "How happy the Evangelical Christendom would have been to give the late Pope the testimony that he had worked for mutual understanding and tolerance among the Churches. But unfortunately we are not able to do so."

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In a leader the "Fosterlandsvännen" in Växjö, a mostly democratic paper in Sweden, rather severely criticized the undeserved publicity obtained by the death of the Pope and the papal election in Finland where there are only 1.500 Roman Catholics. The detailed accounts in the press are attributed to the fact that the interested national press bureaux issue the same material to non-Roman Protestant and Roman Catholic papers alike and these papers pass on the same report unofficially. As a matter of principle this paper is happy about the fact that the international distribution of news has been unjustified partition walls, but adds: "How happy are Swedish Christendom would have been to also see the information that he had worked for mutual understanding and tolerance among the Churches. But unfortunately we are not able to do so."

In a leading article the Social Democratic Government organ "Arbeiderbladet" dissociates itself from the striving after political power on the part of the Roman Catholic Church and its social negligence. Nowhere in Europe are the social contrasts more glaring than in the Roman Catholic countries. The paper mentions the fact that illiteracy has not yet been stamped out in the Pope's own country and maintains that, even though there are brave and selfdenying men within the Roman Catholic Church who take up the fight against social injustice, the Church as such has most often supported a reactionary policy.

"Kristeligt Pressekontor" in Oslo agrees with the "Arbeiderbladet" and adds that the Roman Catholic Church to-day shows greater intolerance than any other church community. Conditions in Spain and Columbia are given as examples. Furthermore, the paper dissociates itself from the political machinery of the Roman Church which ought to be superseded by spiritual weapons, and from the authority ascribed to the Pope so that he may proclaim a dogma like the Assumption of the Virgin Mary for which there is no foundation in the Scriptures.

The Swedish Free Church paper "Morgon-Bladet" calls attention to the enormous hierarchy heading the Roman Catholic Church. "The wealth, the luxury, the splendour, the stately ceremonies surrounding the funeral of the 'deputy of Christ' which, this time more than ever before might be enjoyed by thousands of people in many countries through the means of radio, television and press, is really quite far removed from the life and death experienced by Christ Himself", the paper writes. The authoritarian system of the Roman Church, headed by a person supposed to be infallible, is described in the article as being "dangerous, revolting, and an example of an enormous hubris".

Joint Northern Church Service.

The radio corporations in the Northern countries transmitted yet another joint Northern church service on November 15th, this time from the Cathedral of Ålborg where Bishop Erik Jensen delivered the sermon.

Similar church services have previously been transmitted from Norway, Sweden and Finland.

DENMARK

27 New Churches to be Built in Greater Copenhagen.

At the moment the Church Foundation in Copenhagen, which is a voluntary organization within the Lutheran National Church with the purpose of erecting new churches in the Capital, have plans for the building of no less than 27 churches in Greater Copenhagen, it was stated by the Secretary General, Christian Christiansen, in his report at the council meeting of the Church Foundation recently. The 27 churches will cost a total of 20 million Danish crowns. One new church was dedicated this year and one more will be dedicated on the 1st Sunday in Advent. Work has been started on 3 more churches and 2 are about to be completed, and work on still another will be put in hand before Christmas. According to the building programme work will be started next year in 2 or 3 more parishes.

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The radio corporations in the Northern countries transmitted yet another joint Northern church service on November 15th; this time from the Cathedral of Aarhus where Bishop Eric Hansen delivered the sermon.

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According to the rules for the erection of churches in the Danish Lutheran National Church the Government usually provides one third of the cost, one third is raised through private collections, and the remainder may be obtained through loans.

Evangelical Free Church Council Celebrates Silver Jubilee.

Last month the Evangelical Free Church Council in Denmark celebrated its silver jubilee by a special service in the Jerusalem Church in Copenhagen at which the principal speeches were given by two of the founders of the Free Church Council, Rev. Johs. Nørgård, Head of the Baptist Theological Seminary, and Rev. Niels Mann, from the Methodist Church.

The Evangelical Free Church Council includes the following denominations: The Baptist Church, the Methodist Church, the Missionary Covenant Church in Denmark, the Salvation Army, and the Apostolic Church.

In his sermon Rev. Johs. Nørgård dealt with the special characteristic of the Danish Free Churches which is a Christ-centred preaching, emphasizing evangelization and sanctification in particular. The Free Churches combine an international outlook with a firm stand on a domestic foundation and bid welcome to the ecumenical movement because of its recognition of the differences of conception while at the same time pointing to the underlying spiritual unity between the Christian denominations believing in Jesus Christ as Head of the Church. As for the relations to the Lutheran National Church the minister said that the Free Churches have hitherto been regarded mostly as a corrective to the development in the Lutheran National Church. In his opinion the divergencies in the Lutheran National Church were so great that it could not, as an entity, become a member of the ecumenical fellowship, but he expressed the hope that the Free Churches and the National Church might join in earnest collaboration for the salvation of the nation. The collaboration among the Free Churches themselves ought to lead to the establishment of a "United Free Church in Denmark", Rev. Nørgård felt, if such collaboration could be obtained without curtailing the absolute freedom of the individual Free Church communities.

The jubilee service as well as the following function in the premises of the youth section of the Church at which a number of greetings from the affiliated Free Church communities were read, were attended by a great number of people.

FINLAND

No Women Pastors in Finland This Time.

On October 29th the Assembly of the Finnish Lutheran National Church decided to postpone the decision regarding women pastors for 5 years until the next Church Assembly. With 75 votes against 40 it was decided to set up a committee which is to investigate in the meantime the issues which might result from enabling women to take holy orders and to propose such amendments as might be necessary in this connection.

The proposal mentioned in the last number of Church News for the establishment of a special office, not including the administering of the sacraments, for women theologians in the service of the Church could not be carried. At the ballot on October 30th it did not obtain the necessary majority of 3/4 of the votes as only 83 votes were in favour and 35 against. However, a committee was set up which is to continue work on the matter until the next Church Assembly.

The decision that women lawyers may in future become notaries at Cathedral Chapters, on the other hand, was passed with 110 votes against 6, so that the decision now only needs to be approved by Parliament in order to become valid. It was also decided by a large majortiy to give women access to the positions as cantors and cantor-organists. The Church Canon Committee was requested to propose the necessary amendments before the next Church Assembly.

Other Decisions by the Church Assembly.

The Finnish Church Assembly, moreover, resolved that the clergymen in the Lutheran National Church should also in future be obliged to marry divorcees, but that on such occasions they should be allowed to use a special wedding ritual resembling the one used at civil marriages, but concluding with the blessing of the Church.

As for the Church Handbook it was decided to adopt an amendment in the ritual for morning church services followed by the celebration of Holy Communion, and a number of prayers suitable on various occasions. The new ritual for morning services is more elaborate than hitherto and, among other things, the special character and message of each Sunday is indicated already at the beginning of the service either by antiphony or by the reading of appropriate scripture verses by the minister. The proposed amendments to the rituals at Church functions were not carried, however.

The Church Assembly turned down a proposal for allowing specially appointed laymen to communicate clergymen in parishes with only one pastor, and clergymen's self-communion, though not actually advocated, was thus tacitly approved.

A proposal for the Finnish President being compelled, in each individual case, to appoint as bishop the candidate who had obtained most votes at the election was rejected by the Church Assembly which advocated to continue the present practice that the President is free to choose among the candidates nominated, so that the number of votes obtained only serves as a directive.

At the request of Bishop G.O. Rosenqvist it was resolved that cantors, organists, parish sisters, and others should be installed in office at a special function in the church, led by the vicar.

The Church Assembly finally adopted a motion recommending a better social and spiritual care of gypsies. Among other things, the motion advocated that the Church should give financial aid to homes for gypsy children. In this connection it should be mentioned that the State also tries to create better conditions for the gypsies.

Church Endeavours to Mitigate Unemployment.

Occasioned by the growing unemployment which seems to become one of the main problems of the near future the bishops in the Finnish Lutheran National Church have issued a pastoral letter in which they call for the united efforts of all rehabilitating forces. Besides the Government, the municipal councils and the employers themselves, private persons and societies should also contribute in the largest possible measure to increase employment. Thus, the parochial councils are particularly requested to get repairs, improvements, and building jobs done wherever possible.

The bishops also emphasize the necessity for charitable work among people living in extreme poverty. Finally, the appeal to everyone to support all undertakings aiming at social security, regardless of preconceived opinions, and to contribute in prayer and work towards the establishment of a world ruled by justice and peace.

Many Withdrawals From the Lutheran National Church.

During September-October about 25 persons have resigned daily from the Lutheran National Church in Helsinki (Helsingfors) it appears from the civil registre and it is expected that the total number of withdrawals in the Capital will exceed 4.000 in the course of 1958.

A dominant factor in regard to the withdrawals which usually reaches the peak in October and December is the church taxation from which people who have resigned their membership are exempted.

However, it is expected in church circles that the number of withdrawals will go down in the future following upon the passing of a new Income Tax Act by 135 votes in favour and 49 against. The Act provides for the church tax to be collected simultaneously with the state and municipal taxes. The Act comes into force on January 1st, 1960.

Statistics of Church Attendance and Number of Members of the Churches.

According to a statistics recently published an average of 9.800 people attend the Sunday morning services in the Diocese of Porvoo (Borgå). This is app. 90 people per congregation attending church or 2.3 % of all the members of the Church. The corresponding figure for the whole country is 2.9 %.

Att the end of 1956 93.34 % of the Finnish population were members of the Lutheran National Church. 188.040 persons or 4.36 % were entered in the civil registre and thus did not belong to any denomination. 67.074 belonged to the Orthodox Church, 6.807 belonged to the Lutheran Free Church, 3.885 were Adventists, 1.970 Methodists, 1.965 Roman Catholics, 775 Mormons, 1.541 Jews and 847 Moslems.

Finnish Kirchentag in Jyväskylä.

The next Finnish Kirchentag, which to some extent is a parallel to the Evangelical Kirchentag in Germany, is to be held in Jyväskylä from January 2nd-4th, 1959. Among the speakers will be the President of the German Kirchentag Movement, Dr. R. von Thadden-Trieglaff, the Swedish Bishop Sven Danell, and from Finland the Bishops Eino Sormunen, Martti Simojoki and Eero Lehtinen, the Chaplain-General Toivo Laitinen, the Church Counsellor Dr. Armo Nokkala and the Agricultural Counsellor Viljami Kalliokoski.

The motto of the Finnish Kirchentag will be "The Gospel in the World of Conflicts" and among the subjects to be dealt with in the addresses will be "The Church - Museum or Lighthouse?", "The Good Tidings - Only for Us of for Everybody?", and "New Forms of Living - A New Possibility?".

New Book by Mika Valtari with Religious Colouring.

A new book by the Nobel prize-winner Mika Valtari, entitled "Feliks onnellinen" (Felix the Happy), was published on his 50-years birthday. In reviewing the book Dr. Arno Nokkala, Church Counsellor, among other things, writes about its religious colouring: "It would be too simple to maintain that the religious issue in Mika Valtari's production is evident only in his very early and very tendentious first work "On the Flight From God" and in his lyrical poetry "To the Foot of Thy Cross" from his short theological period, and that only "Felix the Happy" takes us back to his starting point in the middle of the 'twenties. Valtari may have written much which seems to ignore completely the sphere of religious life, but if one has followed him from work to work, one cannot fail to notice that he has also always carried with him something of the Mika Valtari who once considered following in the footsteps of his father and become consecrated for the ecclesiastical calling. The Gospel itself has left its true stamp on the pages of "Felix the Happy".

ICELAND

Bishop Gudmundsson Retires on Account of Age.

Recently the Bishop of Iceland, the Rt. Rev. 'Asmundur Gudmundsson, was 70 and thus passed the age limit. It is possible that he may continue in office for another 5 years in as much as the Independence Party in Althing (Parliament) has moved an amendment to the Act dealing with episcopal election according to which the age limit for the Bishop should be raised from 70 to 75 years.

Should the motion not be carried, a new bishop must be elected soon and this episcopal election will be followed with considerable attention.

The Skálholt Church Now Under Roof.

The new church at Skálholt, to which the foundation stone was laid on July 1st, 1956, in connection with the 900 years' jubilee for the establishment of the See of Iceland, has now been roofed. The roof is slated and is a gift from Norway as are also the slabs for the floor.

NORWAY

Golden Jubilee of the Free Theological Faculty.

Last month the Free Theological Faculty in Oslo celebrated its golden jubilee by a 4-days' celebration. The Faculty was established on a voluntary church basis in protest against the liberal theology which had gained a footing in the faculty of theology at the State University. The Faculty was founded on the initiative of Professor Sigurd Odland who had been a lecturer at the State faculty, but resigned his office as a protest against the appointment of the liberal Professor Johannes Ording. The 79-years old Professor Ole Hallesby was the Rector of the Free Theological Faculty for many years. Its present leader is Carl Fr. Wisløff. During the 50 years the Faculty has trained some 1.200 divinity students, many more than has the State faculty. Two thirds of the clergy in the Lutheran National Church come from the Free Theological Faculty and likewise the vast majority of theologians serving in the voluntary Christian organizations have been trained here.

The main event of the celebrations took place in the University hall in the presence of the Norwegian King, representatives of the Church Department, all the professors from the University faculty, a number of foreign guests and representatives of the voluntary Christian organizations and institutions.

Bishop Johs. Smemo, Oslo, thanked the Faculty for its contribution towards the training of clergymen and emphasized that the existence of the Free Theological Faculty had played a great part in keeping the active church members within the framework of the Lutheran National Church. As the representative of the University faculty Professor Nils A. Dahl said that the scientific contributions by the Free Theological Faculty commanded great respect. He stressed the point that the relationship between the two faculties has been steadily improving and that it is no longer characterized by opposition, but by a spirit of co-existence and considerable co-operation, both in the factual as well as the personal sphere. Several of the speakers during the celebrations also touched on the questions of literalism, confessional faithfulness, and scientific standards and described them as being banners which should be kept flying by the Free Theological Faculty.

Proposal for Humane-Ethical Instruction in the Schools.

The Humane-Ethical Union in Norway has proposed that the new Education Act which is to be read in Parliament shortly should include a provision for instruction in the history of ethics and religion in schools where there are more than 5 children whose parents wish to have them exempted from instruction in Christianity.

The Christian daily paper in Oslo "Vårt Land" is against the proposal, maintaining that if that should be the case then instruction ought to be given, not only in ethics, but also in Methodist, Baptist, Roman Catholic, and Mormon thinking - "and one cannot expect Government to provide religious instruction à la carte", the paper writes.

Literal Application in Daily Life of Scripture Verse.

Last month a rather unusual Christian radio transmission caused considerable attention in Norway. Some 50 members of the Frogner congregation in Oslo had promised to live, as literally as possible, in accordance with the golden rule: "Whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them", and in front of the open microphone some of them - anonymously - told about their experiences during the six weeks the "experiment" lasted.

The weekly paper "Vår Kirke" calls the experiences from the parish of Frogner "a challenge to us all" to live according to these words of Jesus. "It does not take much imagination to picture to oneself what the result would be if these 50-60 people had followers elsewhere in the parishes."

Kristian Hansson Died.

The Director of the Norwegian Church Department, Kristian Hansson, has died, 63 years of age. Mr. Hansson was on the board of the Northern Ecumenical Institute, Sigtuna, and in the years past has attended a number of ecumenical conferences. During the War he was a member of "Kristen Samråd" (Christian Joint Council) which took a decisive part in the life of the Church during the first two years of the occupation and contributed to the drawing up in 1942 of the confessional declaration of the Norwegian Church, called "The Foundation of the Church".

Two Missionary Societies in Favour of the African Broadcasting Station.

At their meetings last month the Norwegian Missionary Society and the Norwegian Lutheran Mission were positively inclined towards the approaches by the Lutheran World Federation for support to the proposed Lutheran radio station in Africa. The Lutheran Mission resolved, not only to give financial aid towards the plan, but also to provide personnel for the station if this was needed.

Advent Instead of "Christmas in Advance".

At the end of October the Housewives' Union in Norway in a letter to members of the Church, business people and advertizing men is all in favour of everybody joining in making Christmas a festive event, but not till December! It is suggested that special Christmas displays, the Christmas decoration of streets and such like should be postponed until 1st Sunday in Advent, and that the Christmas tree which belongs in the home should not be included in decorations in shops, offices and similar places.

The Housewives' Union would like to see Christmas once more become primarily the joyful celebration of the home and that Christmas parties for children and grown-up's ahead of time should be avoided in order that Christmas should not be celebrated "in advance". In place of Christmas trees it is suggested to use Advent wreaths at functions taking place before Christmas, so that one more candle is lighted each Sunday during the period of Advent. On the whole it is advocated that the idea of Advent should gain a firmer hold on the minds of people.

Last year the local associations of the Housewives' Union themselves led the way by abstaining from any special Christmas arrangements before Christmas. - In the last few years there has been a tendency to begin with Christmas displays etc. at ever earlier times.

Controversy Regarding the Taking of a Film in a Church.

Should it be permitted to use a church for the shooting of a scene depicting the consecration of a bishop as part of a rather critical film about the Church? Recently this question has greatly excited the minds of people in Norway.

Axel Kielland's play "The Lord and His Servant" which is most critical of phenomena and problems in Norwegian and Swedish church life, is now being filmed and the film company wanted to shoot a scene showing the consecration of a bishop in the Church of Uranienborg in Oslo. This was refused by both the parochial council and the bishop, Bishop Johs. Smemo. Then the parochial council in Vang, near Hamar, was approached and here both the parochial council and the bishop, Bishop Kr. Schjelderup, gave permission for the use of the church whereupon the application was granted by the Church Department.

Bishop Smemo motivated his standpoint by maintaining that the trend of the film was in contradiction to the confessional teachings of the Church with regard to perdition; that it is undignified to "act" a sacred ceremony like the consecration of a bishop; and that the film relates a real event under fictitious names and takes sides in a most delicate matter in Swedish church life.

A number of newspapers maintain that a refusal on the part of the Church in such a case is a proof of lacking understanding of the raison d'être of artistic and cultural forms of expression, while other quarters feel that discrimination must be justified in view of the tendency of the film. Erling Wikborg, M.P., put the question in Parliament about the motivation for lending the church in Vang to the taking of the film, and the Christian daily paper in Oslo "Vårt Land" feels, that the decision may have many consequences in the future. "If the Church Department is free to place our churches at the disposal of people for quite irrelevant purposes we may come to witness all sorts of things", it says in a leading article. The paper refers to the fact that according to present law the church premises may only be used for religious and Christian purposes, and that it is expressly stated that the parochial councils have no authority to permit the use of the church "for other purposes". Lectures and discussions for propaganda purposes are not allowed, and the paper feels that this must also apply to the taking of films for propaganda purposes.

SWEDEN

Confessional Front Being Established in Sweden.

At the beginning of this month a meeting was held in the Retreat-House of Hjelmseryd, with Dean G.A. Dancll, Växjö, in the Chair, at which representatives of groups within the Lutheran National Church, opposed to the decision by the Church Assembly concerning women entering the Church, met in order to discuss the establishment of a confessional front within the Church. Later in the month another meeting

will be held at Uppsala at which High Church and so-called "old-Church members" led by Bishop Bo Giertz are to discuss their standpoint.

Through the press it has become known that Dean G.A. Danell has approached leading school authorities about the possibilities for becoming an instructor in Christianity at secondary schools. But so far he has not made up his mind whether to resign his office or not as a protest against the decision of the Church Assembly.

The well-known High Church minister Dr. Gunnar Rosendal, Osby, has declared publicly that he will not withdraw from the Church or resign from his office. "One does not forsake one's mother in the hour of disgrace and degradation", he said recently in an address delivered in Stockholm. At this occasion he strongly advocated the establishment of a confessional front within the Church, consisting of a number of groups - High Church people, Bibeltrogna Vänner (Faithful Friends of the Bible), "Evangeliska Fosterlandsstiftelsen" (Evangelical National Missionary Society), etc., and he also expressed the opinion that this organization might perhaps also act as a political party which should work for a free, independent Church, separated from the State. "Since the Church has become so mixed up with politics, it is only fair that politics also become mixed up with a great deal of religion", Dr. G. Rosendal commented. In a statement to the "Stockholms-Tidningen" he has emphasized that such a party might be founded on the 1.500 clergymen who, according to an opinion poll this summer, are against women pastors.

Swedish Chairman of the Quaker World Committee.

At the meeting last month of the World Committee of the Society of Friends (Quakers) at Bad Pyrmont, West Germany, Mrs. Elsa Cedergren Sweden, was elected Chairman of the Committee in succession to the American Errol Elliott.

The Free Churches Join in the Spiritual Care.

In connection with a question to the Minister of Communications the Free Church M.P., Rev. Einar Rimmerfors, stated that he would take steps to have the rules changed for using the SOS-numbers of the telephone system in calling the Spiritual Care Centre. Until now it has been the rule in several of the bigger towns that, in asking for the clergyman on duty, one has only been able to become connected with a pastor in the Lutheran National Church; but Rev. Rimmerfors feels that in the different places the services of clergymen from both the Lutheran National Church and the Free Churches should be employed and that endeavours should be made by the local centres to solve the distribution of the various church communities in an ecumenical spirit

Mission Church in India Becomes Independent.

The Swedish Missionary Covenant Church has approved a Constitution for the Church which has grown up on the mission field in India, making this Church independent under the name of "The Hindustani Covenant Church". The approval of the Constitution by the Indian congregations themselves is now the only step remaining. It is noteworthy that the new independent Church, according to the Constitution, is quite free to join the North Indian Church Union, the establishment of which is being debated during these years.

Church Play Revival in the Swedish Church.

In the course of an address delivered in Finland recently the Youth Secretary, Miss Signe Larsson, stated that one may speak of a church play revival in the work among the young people of the Swedish Lutheran National Church during the last few years. Some 80 church play groups are at work throughout the country. Two associations are engaged in this work, "The Association for Church Dramatics" whose leader is Hermann Greid, stage-manager, and "The Liturgy and Dramatics Union" whose most prominent member is the Rev. Olov Hartman, Sigtuna, and whose instructor and stage-manager is Mr. Tuve Nyström. Especially the last association stresses the point that a church play is not theatre, but liturgy and church service. The altar is the centre and in the enactment of the play the primary importance is not attached so much to the matter of parts and individuals, but rather to the matter of general impression and the message. The part played by speech choirs has been steadily growing during the last few years.

Christian Daily Paper Ceases Publication.

The politically Liberal daily paper "Morgon-Bladet" of a Christian outlook, has ceased publication from November 1st for reasons of economy. The paper is a victim of the "paper death" which has also hit several other Swedish papers during the last year. "Morgon-Bladet" was a continuation of the Free Church publication "Svenska Morgonbladet" which was first published in 1890. Now only one specifically Christian daily paper remains, viz. "Dagen", which is published by the Pentecostal Mission.